

de-de-camp as General Ross's personal assistant, houseboy, and secretary, who answers the phone for him and brings him documents. His service to the white general only shows that the American military is not racist, but open to all races and ethnicities. Thus, the Asian assistant imaginatively covers up any implicit anti-Asian bias alluded to in the film that might alienate viewers.

8. For more on the digital creation of *Hulk*, see Ron Magid, "Growing Pains," *American Cinematographer* 84.7 (July 2003): 46-57.

9. For more on *Fresh Kill*, see my "Cinema Frames, Videoscapes, and Cyberspace: Exploring Shu Lea Cheang's *Fresh Kill*," *positions: east asia cultures critique* 9.2 (Fall 2001): 401-422.

10. Quoted in Shu-Mei Shih, "Globalisation and Minoritisation," 95. From *China Times Weekly* 65 (March April 1993), 75.

11. Seth Clark Silberman, "Fish Lips and Television Sets: *Fresh Kill*'s Critical (Re)Consciousness," *Fifteenth Anniversary Asian American International Film Festival* (catalogue). (Washington, DC: Asian American Arts and Media, 1996), 28.

12. Fredric Jameson, *The Geopolitical Aesthetic: Cinema and Space in the World System* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 3.

8

Becoming Hollywood?

Hong Kong Cinema in the New Century

CHUCK KLEINHANS

Hong Kong news-item headline, April 2000: "Tung sees into SAR's [Special Administrative Region's] future after Disneyland visit."

Photo with caption: "Taking the Mickey. Tung Chee-hwa pats Minnie Mouse as Mickey looks on in a visit to California's Disneyland. He met Disney's chief executives Michael Eisner and president Robert Iger." The write-up:

Tung Chee-hwa came face-to-face with the future of Hong Kong tourism yesterday—eagerly re-acquainting himself with Mickey Mouse, patting Minnie Mouse on the cheek and bumping into popular Chinese heroine Mulan. . . . "It's been a wonderful visit for me personally," he said after a tour in vast contrast to his two days of congressional lobbying and White House and State Department meetings in Washington. . . . [He adds,] "It has made me even more confident that the building of Disneyland in Hong Kong will strengthen Hong Kong's economy and bring our tourism to world-class standards. Disney's innovation and technology is unbelievable and I am sure will upgrade our own entertainment industry". . . . He returned to a San Francisco residence he owns and will be on leave until he comes home at the weekend.¹

I am not an expert on Hong Kong or Hong Kong cinema, nor on Chinese cinema, but I do feel confident in making some observations about

Hollywood cinema. So when I was asked to participate in a Hong Kong conference that asked, "Do we need to follow Hollywood to become more competitive," I felt that I had something to say. Initially I proposed to answer this question by examining some films made within Hollywood by Hong Kong directors and actors and considering what is gained and lost in the transnational crossing.² However, on further thought, I realized that this was not a sufficient base for analysis because actual conditions are much more complicated than any bipolar model of Hollywood and Hong Kong has assumed.

Consider *Romeo Must Die* (2000), starring Jet Li and Aaliyah, directed by a Polish-born cinematographer who worked in Hollywood throughout the 1980s and 1990s, Andrzej Bartkowiak. Shot in Vancouver, although set in San Francisco and Oakland and including a side trip to Hong Kong, the film presents the familiar Romeo-and-Juliet story with the lovers' families presented as warring gang families: one Chinese American, the other African American. Simply laying out this sketchy outline reveals the film as a transnational and multicultural text. Is it then also a Hong Kong film, a Hollywood film, a hybrid, or something else? I want to address that question in the process of developing my discussion, but I also acknowledge that this set of concerns is apparently of little interest in the United States—where it is just assumed to be an American film—but of considerable interest in Hong Kong.

A quick survey of a Web site for Hong Kong film critics³ shows that both films directed by Hong Kong directors working in Hollywood and U.S. films starring Hong Kong actors have garnered compelling critical interest and are basically treated as part of Hong Kong cinema.⁴ Thus the site presents key reviews of *Maximum Risk* (dir. Ringo Lam, 1996), *Double Team* (dir. Tsui Hark, 1997), *Mr. Magoo* (dir. Stanley Tong, 1997), *Face/Off* (dir. John Woo, 1997), *The Replacement Killers* (dir. Antoine Fuqua, 1998), and others. These can be added to the substantial body of work of Jackie Chan overseas, as well as one-shots such as the Jean-Claude Van Damme vehicle *Knock Off* (dir. Tsui Hark, 1998, Hong Kong/United States). At the Hong Kong conference, Kin Yan Elyssa Szeto discussed *Anna and the King* (dir. Andy Tennant, 1999) as a Hong Kong-Hollywood hybrid, and has continued by examining transnational Asian American martial-arts films.⁵ Even the nominally Taiwan-U.S. production of *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (dir. Ang Lee, 2000) used a Hong Kong crew as well as Hong Kong stars. In subsequent years, the pace of cross-fertilization has increased, and we could add to the list easily.

We know the familiar story of the reception of Hong Kong action cinema in the United States: the initial interest in Bruce Lee and Kung Fu films in the 1970s spawned development of a U.S. product containing domestic martial-arts stars such as Chuck Norris and later Steven Seagal, as well as foreign arrivals such as Van Damme. Initially, the imported Hong Kong

cult film was domesticated as a U.S. low-budget genre. But at the same time, Hollywood itself was undergoing a large change, both economically and in terms of genres and style: the emergence of the "high-concept" film, and specifically the blockbuster masculine action film most recognizable in the 1980s in the series of Sylvester Stallone vehicles and flourishing through successful series such as *Lethal Weapon* and *Die Hard*.⁶

It is also now familiar legend that portrays figures such as Quentin Tarantino, video-store clerk and enthusiast for Hong Kong action films during the 1980s (especially the work of John Woo), who imitated those films in their own work. Two points are worth remarking on here. First, if we are concerned with a primarily linear history of development populated by auteur directors and stars, this legend has considerable explanatory purchase. Second, the legend replays the simple logics of imperial absorption and countercultural resistance. Thus the West can be charged with Orientalizing and expropriating on the large scale and also with resisting and appreciating on the small scale. Fan culture—in the small sense of kung fu film cultists, but also in the larger sense that includes knowledgeable practitioners of martial arts, members of the Chinese diaspora, and (some) academic specialists in Asian cinema—provides for the production of another knowledge.

But before drawing any quick conclusion, we would also have to account for what seems like a postmodern appropriation of stylistic flourishes: in Tarantino's *Reservoir Dogs* (1992), the heist shootout and later gun-to-gun confrontations; in *True Romance* (dir. Tony Scott, 1993), the final slow-motion shootout among multiple opposed groups and individuals; and the bullet or knife point-of-view (POV) shots in *Natural Born Killers* (dir. Oliver Stone, 1994). These are rather obvious borrowings that are not particularly profound in terms of influence. Rather, they are best seen as part of the endless absorption of stylistic elements that has made the Hollywood cinema so powerful in its classic period and beyond.⁷

In the largest sense, the Hollywood model of narrative cinema has been the overarching and dominant style for world cinema, especially during and after the 1920s. Thus we would recognize that greater Chinese cinema in general and Hong Kong cinema in particular share a broad set of concepts that govern dramatic organization, storytelling, and the way film technology is used. In that framework, it is easy to see how a figure such as John Woo can be influenced by Hollywood films, which were, of course, readily available to him growing up in Hong Kong. He has said as much in interviews, often remarking on how dance sequences in Hollywood musicals shaped his understanding of how to organize the gunplay sequences for which he is so well known and regarded. Woo was always already within the shadow of Hollywood as he began filmmaking. But of course he would not be so notable or influential if he had not also developed within the traditions, practices, and themes distinctive to Hong Kong cinema.

Most important, Woo worked with particular stars whose talents and images contributed to his recognizable authorship in the cinema.

So, when we speak of Hollywood and Hong Kong cinemas, what are we most concerned with, and what lies below the surface of the discussion? What is the aim of the comparison, and what are its anxieties? Are we addressing a matter of national cinema, even if we now recognize Hollywood as transnational in finance, production, and distribution, and Hong Kong was never a nation, going straight from colony to SAR without the phase of postcoloniality? Is the discussion about the status of auteur directors and stars when they cross over? By looking at significant changes from the Hong Kong films to the Hollywood films of these directors and stars, we can ask if author and star-image identities are being changed, erased, or redeployed in the cross-cultural transition. Is crossover viable, and if so, at what price?

Let me take what may seem like an odd detour here to gain some distance on the question. A historical analogy may be useful. Part of the genius of the Hollywood system, as we all know, has been to use imported talent: stars, directors, and technicians. From Charles Chaplin and Rudolph Valentino to Slavko Vorkapitch and Marlene Dietrich through Alfred Hitchcock, Carmen Miranda, and Douglas Sirk to Paul Verhoeven, Salma Hayek, and Jean Reno and even Godzilla. So now it's John Woo, Chow Yun Fat, Michelle Yeoh, and Jet Li.⁸ Consider Austria, which never had a strong film industry, but which sent a remarkable group of directors to Hollywood: Erich von Stroheim, Josef von Sternberg, Fritz Lang, Billy Wilder, Edgar Ulmer, Otto Preminger, and Fred Zinneman. We could even try to constitute an Austrian cinema in exile (although I don't think this is the most productive way to think of these figures) by marking the recurrence of certain themes in their work such as depictions of central Europe, memory, the exile's experience, an interior exile out of time and out of place, a particular sense of loss after World War II, and especially in Wilder and Ulmer, a dark cynicism and bitterness about the United States.

Should we be trying to read the U.S. work of Hong Kong directors in the same way—as reflecting an essential “Hong Kongness” that travels with them? Is Stanley Tong's version of *Mr. Magoo* a continuation of certain aspects of Hong Kong culture and identity? Should the film be bracketed along with *Happy Together* (dir. Wong Kar Wai, 1997) as Hong Kong cinema set in another place? Or is Tong simply an opportunistic sellout seizing the main chance? I provide this ridiculous example only to underline that for Hong Kong critics (or at least the ones I have access to) there is always a deeply ambivalent approach to Hong Kong identity and its existence in attenuated forms when actors and directors work abroad.⁹ As an outsider I cannot add to that discussion, but only be aware of it and find it remarkably refreshing to observe the openness to consider all questions, to criticize and comment on all matters of change, displacement, and inces-

sant transition. At the same time, however, I have to notice a downside of an obsessive anxiety among Hong Kong intellectuals about Hong Kong identity.

The question of an essential Hong Kong identity can be examined beyond the perhaps subtle auteur expressions of directors and considered more openly with actors. While Jackie Chan developed his career within the framework of being a Hong Kong superstar, how he is read changes with his own global transition.¹⁰ (A movement highlighted most explicitly in *Who Am I?* [dir. Benny Chan and Jackie Chan, 1998], itself often read as an allegory of the 1997 handover of Hong Kong to the People's Republic of China.) As various critics have noted, Jackie becomes “cute” in his Hollywood biracial buddy incarnations with Chris Tucker and Owen Wilson.¹¹ While the most successful international star on a worldwide scale, his work has faltered in some recent films.¹² Yet he also exists as a star property in internationally syndicated television animation (“Jackie Chan Adventures”) and continues to “go global” with vehicles such as *Around the World in 80 Days* (dir. Frank Coraci, 2004). Does this transnationalization imply a loss of Hong Kong identity? In Hong Kong or in the East Asia region, or among fans who can appreciate the culturally specific skills in films such as *Drunken Master* (dir. Yuen Woo-ping, 1978), Chan's earlier films maintain a tension between modernity and social tradition. But clearly something is lost in the process of marketing a star image on an international platform. While Jackie Chan has been imported to the United States as “lovable” (but not notably sexual), as he ages that quality is harder to retain—one reason the animation version of Jackie may have a longer career in the future than the cinematographic version.

Similarly, the importing of other Hong Kong male stars such as Chow Yun Fat and Jet Li presents problems of ideological translation, particularly around Western expectations of normative masculinity and the Hollywood norm of a double plot of drama and love. The classic Hollywood film narrative uses two lines of action, one of which is a heterosexual romance.¹³ In the United States, the romance line involves conspicuous markers of masculinity that are emphatically enacted in scenes involving the couple. In other cultures, the proper markers of masculinity may more obviously involve the male role within the extended family and social standing in the community. Furthermore, in much of the world, intimate displays are not appropriate for public consumption. Thus the cross-cultural problem here involves the structural nature of the dominant Hollywood convention and the culturally different markers of appropriate masculinity. The cultural difference in expectations has repercussions for Asian male stars. Thus, in discussing *Romeo Must Die*, Richard Corliss praises Jet Li's martial skills but notes “a romance so tepid it is consummated with a hug.”¹⁴ Similarly, in his Hollywood incarnations, Chow Yun Fat has been handicapped by cultural limits on playing the romantic hero. While his Hong

Kong roles display a range of characters (for example, police officer, hit man, and god of gamblers) and show a talent for comic, dramatic, and action acting, in general his masculinity is granted a priori by social role and bearing, and thus it is simply presented, not performed in romantic behavior.

But further analysis requires a baseline reorientation. Cultural analysis must be linked to political economy before it flies off into wishful thinking. In recent years Hollywood has attained new heights in revenue.¹⁵ In 1998, domestic (North American) theater admissions hit \$1.4 billion. Box-office revenue reached \$6.88 billion. Worldwide home video revenue was \$8.1 billion. The blockbuster hit *Titanic* returned \$3.2 billion in 1998 on a \$200 million investment. At the same time costs are rising. The worldwide revenues for blockbuster films easily override cases of domestic box-office failure (as happened with *Godzilla* in 1998), thus spurring increasing commitments to simultaneous global openings. Hollywood relies on overseas revenue as never before. The economic logic of blockbusters continues relentlessly for the studios. The mammoth hits are necessary to carry the overhead of the operation and the inevitable losers. And today the hits are potentiated through multiple revenue streams represented in different media (theatrical, television, video rental, digital video disc [DVD] sales, soundtrack recordings, and so forth) and in licensed merchandise encompassing music, print publishing, theme parks, retail stores, resorts, video games, and television spin-offs.

At the same time, through the primary vehicle of the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA), Hollywood and its parent conglomerates have been extremely aggressive, and for the most part very effective, in attacking trade barriers to film and other media entertainment throughout the world. Attaining World Trade Organization status produces abolition of media trade barriers. The results for local and regional markets has been extreme, undercutting local film production in many countries and sharply reducing regional overseas revenue for Hong Kong and other centers of film production that previously depended on export revenues. At home the MPAA and media conglomerates have successfully extended copyright, so that, for example, Mickey Mouse, who was about to enter the public domain in 2003, is now protected for another twenty years. And Hollywood has been especially concerned with issues of software piracy, particularly in Asia. It has also been moving rapidly to accomplish a new technological change in distribution—digital projection via satellite—that holds the promise of simultaneous worldwide premieres and a reduction in piracy through signal encoding, while also making existing projection systems economically obsolete and thus reducing competition by weeding out those who cannot afford to work at the same technical level. At the same time, Hollywood is strategizing on how to respond to the growth of commercial and pay television abroad, as well as the changing nature of foreign mar-

kets, which show declines in theatrical exhibition as populations acquire greater home access to more channels and other television options.

In the United States, the pressures for putting more and more money into blockbusters has produced a situation in which big films keep getting bigger and more expensive. Stars are now taking “back-end” deals, participating in first-dollar grosses, while studios seek to spread their risk by co-financing and splitting rights with other studios. The number of medium-budget films have been drastically reduced while there has been an expansion of low-budget niche-market product—for example, the independent or “Sundance” film, which itself becomes more and more uniform as it is brought into the mainstream. The odd result is globalization on the high end and fragmentation and niche marketing on the low end.

With this context in mind, I want to turn to an aesthetic analysis, David Bordwell’s notable “Aesthetics in Action: Kung Fu, Gunplay, and Cinematic Expressivity.”¹⁶ In a comparative analysis, using the original *Lethal Weapon* (dir. Richard Donner, 1987) and *Hearty Response* (Law Man, 1986) as his examples, Bordwell points out that Hollywood action film uses a predominant style that maximizes movement: action in every image, usually showing no movement completed; a short shot length; and camera movement along with actors in motion. The result, he argues, is that performance is minimized while other techniques compensate for this change. The overall effect is to produce a feeling of “general excitement.” In contrast, Hong Kong films show more kinetic impact and are more “readable,” using a “pause-burst-pause” pattern in actor movement and cinematic technique. Thus actor performance is more pronounced and prominent in the Hong Kong films. Bordwell’s analysis is clear and convincing and demonstrates how a much more modest and thrifty production process can produce important aesthetic features in a dramatic narrative.

In his comparative analysis of late 1980s action cinema, Bordwell validates the Hong Kong film by validating its superior economy of activity, but his essay does not exhaust the subject. Hollywood action films tend to combine elements from a variety of actions: most obviously the chase, the shootout, and hand-to-hand combat. Each of these can be further subdivided and elaborated. Thus the vehicular chase in the James Bond films always includes special features and weapons built into the car, and the auto chase reaches a notable high point in *The French Connection* (dir. William Friedkin, 1971), after which directors tend to outdo each other in clever additions to the number of vehicles and crashes, and to extend the types of transportation (motorcycles, cars, trucks, busses, trains, subways, boats, planes, and so forth) and places involved. Hong Kong does not provide the same range of places for pursuit as southern California, say. (Increasingly, Hong Kong films are being made elsewhere: for example, Thailand, Malaysia, and Vancouver, as are Hollywood films seeking economic breaks.) But it is also obvious that modestly budgeted work literally cannot afford

to tie up vast amounts of public space and transportation to stage a large-scale chase or develop and incorporate elaborate computer-generated imagery (CGI) work to substitute for location shooting. Hollywood's immense capital resources can create grander spectacles, more-elaborate special effects, and so forth. Thus aesthetics are tightly bound with production pragmatics.

But more significantly, fight choreography in the action film itself typically proceeds through combinations, sometimes developed through specific martial-arts styles,¹⁷ and in Hollywood productions often through a combination of chase, gunplay, and hand-to-hand combat combined with spectacular sets and special effects. Regarding Bordwell's contrast of *Lethal Weapon* and *Hearty Response*, subsequent Hollywood films seem to have taken up the difference with yet another stylistic absorption. *The Matrix* (dir. Andy Wachowski and Larry Wachowski, 1999) uses Yuen Woo-ping and *Romeo Must Die* employs Corey Yuen as martial-arts choreographers (a position the latter also held in *Lethal Weapon 4*—as if Hollywood deal makers were carefully following Bordwell's aesthetic analysis). It seems that Hollywood has partially, but significantly, adapted the “pause-burst-pause” technique by importing the very people who developed it as specialist technicians. For the same results or less? My initial conclusion is “somewhat less,” but this fits with what we have come to expect of Hollywood aesthetic hegemony: a gradual absorption, not a decisive transformation.¹⁸ At the same time, Bordwell's argument validates certain continuing strengths of Hong Kong cinema. For example, Johnnie To's *The Mission* (1999) includes superbly dramatic scenes, such as a shopping-center shootout with an extreme emphasis on stasis, employing an existing location that can be rented for filmmaking during off hours.

The history of Hong Kong's Golden Harvest studio, from upstart in the early 1970s to major presence in a short time, demonstrates what can be accomplished by creating alternative action heroes, such as Bruce Lee and Jackie Chan, who negotiate modernizing cultures and traditional Chinese family values with extraordinary skill, and in Chan's case who add irreverent local comedy to the martial-arts mix. Golden Harvest's films are different from Hollywood's in that they are grounded in a distinctive local performance tradition and appeal to diasporic Chinese communities as well as East Asian regional audiences. Golden Harvest became so successful that they expanded into distribution and theater ownership (three hundred in the region) and were exporting 150 films a year in the early 1990s. The studio even tried to break into the U.S. major market but managed only one certifiable hit, 1990's *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* (dir. Steve Barron), which had a \$13.5 million budget and returned \$135 million in U.S. theatrical gross and \$67.6 million in U.S. video rentals. But when the East Asian economy tanked in the early 1990s, uncertainty reigned in commercial film. Hollywood responded with aggressive (and largely successful)

attempts to remove trade barriers and capture more of the East and South Asian theatrical market at the expense of regional production and distribution.

Jackie Chan's evolving career as a deliberately transnational star shows some of the problems in crossing over. For the past ten years, Chan has alternated between productions based in Hong Kong and Hollywood while aiming for films marketed around the world. For example, *The Tuxedo* (2002) was produced by U.S.-based companies lead by Dreamworks SKG, directed by Kevin Donovan from a U.S.-generated script. Immigrant New York City taxi driver Jimmy Tong (Chan) is hired as chauffeur for a James Bond type of secret agent. When the boss is injured, Chan takes over pursuit of the villain, aided by a neophyte government agent (Jennifer Love Hewitt) while wearing a high-tech tuxedo that grants him superhuman skills. Fitting Chan into the Hollywood framework alters his trademark martial-arts actions in several ways. First, because of Hollywood finance protocols and production insurance rules, he cannot perform all his stunts but must employ a double.¹⁹ Second, increased special effects, plus wirework and editing between the double and the star, remove the “realism” of the viewer's knowing that Chan is doing his own stunts. Third, much of the action is attributed to the clothing, not Chan's performing body, and the first big action sequence features fancy stunt driving, not Chan's body in motion. Budgeted at \$60 million, the film returned a disappointing \$50 million theatrical return in North America, boosted by \$48.6 million in non-U.S. showings. Critical response was largely negative, with Chan fans disappointed by the changes. The implausibility of the pairing with Hewitt was aggravated by her character's inconsistency: part science nerd, part sexy agent. Inexplicably, she repeatedly expresses girlish fear in fight sequences while exhibiting aggressive and effective physical attack skills.

Chan returned to U.S. screens the following year in *Shanghai Knights*, a re-pairing with Owen Wilson based on the highly successful *Shanghai Noon*. But later in 2003, the Hong Kong produced *The Medallion* (dir. Gordon Chan) bombed. Budgeted at \$41 million, the film had a U.S. theatrical gross of \$22.1 million and a non-U.S. theatrical gross of \$4.4 million. Continuing the previous problems, many actions are done with stunt doubles and wirework. The 1980s Hong Kong characteristic Bordwell noted of fully articulated body and performance oriented action is now changed to a stuttering form which denies Chan many of his old style action and comic opportunities.²¹ Part of the problem is relative and contextual. Employing its characteristic absorption of commercially effective new styles, Hollywood adopted the comic action formula quickly. With many new digital effects available, Hollywood churned out effective glossy stunt action work such as *Charlie's Angels* (dir. McG, 2000) and *Charlie's Angels: Full Throttle* (dir. McG, 2003), using female actors without martial arts and stunt training, a complete contrast to the marketing of 1995's *Rumble in the*

Bronx as “Jackie Chan: No Fear. No Stuntmen. No Equal.” Adaptation to the Hollywood market remains awkward. *The Medallion* puts forward a totally unconvincing romance interest when Chan as a Hong Kong police officer is paired with an Interpol officer (Claire Forlani). On their first encounter, she slaps him for not having stayed in touch after they had worked together 3 months earlier. (Comic outtakes of this shot are repeated in the end credits.) Clearly the gesture narratively signals that they had been sexually intimate during the previous assignment, yet the acting throughout belies any personal allure between the couple. While Chan is marked from the start as a bold police officer, fulfilling a firm masculinity established by position, rank, and action, the addition of the romance line seems grafted on: fulfilling Hollywood conventions and painfully implausible. Taken literally, the Chan character would have to be regarded as a “love ‘em and leave ‘em” hero—hardly an admirable masculinity in Asia or Western society, and contradictory to narrative and character throughout the film, as well as Chan’s star image.²²

So to return to the question—“does Hong Kong need to follow Hollywood to be more competitive?” We can answer in this way: On the high end of the global blockbuster with big stars, elaborate special effects, and world wide marketing, no other national cinema or even partnership (for example, the European Economic Community) can compete with or successfully challenge Hollywood on its own turf. At least not at this stage. As Thomas Schatz has concluded:

As the major studios partner up on megabudget global blockbusters designed for that “much larger group who care to be entertained,” they are reinventing the oligopoly structure of old, cooperating (if not actively colluding) to control the movie marketplace, insuring their profits and securing their status as an exclusive cartel. By partnering on high-end pictures, on the films that dominate the global market and generate the lion’s share of the revenues, the studios virtually guarantee that the budgets for both production and marketing will be so high that no one can possibly compete, thus creating “barriers to entry” at the most lucrative level of the business.²³

To put it simply, if John Woo is going to make big-budget action films like *Mission Impossible 2*, there is only one place to go: Hollywood (a global economic entity, not a geographic location, since almost all of *Mission Impossible 2* was shot in Australia, which gave a better budget break).

At the other end, the small independent end, there may seem to be more freedom, but there is actually a fairly limited diversity. What works best is highly formulaic, a fact much bemoaned by observers of the U.S. independent film scene, if by “best” we mean economically successful. Moments of

transition always allow some openings for new expressions, but not always effective challenges to the dominant system. The independent sector remains wavering between a “cockroach-capitalist” response to the dominant system and the creation of a waiting area for those who hope to be called into the main arena.

Does Hong Kong have to follow Hollywood to compete? I have argued that technological and marketing dominance by Hollywood create conditions that make it virtually impossible to compete with it directly, head-on, and that its overall system absorbs foreign elements, changing only in style rather than allowing significant “working from within.” A competent response has to find an alternative strategy, but this involves asking what is “success” in this competition: economic? ideological? or artistic?

Notes

An earlier version of this article was presented at the conference “Year 2000 and Beyond: History, Technology and the Future of Transnational Chinese Media,” held at Hong Kong Baptist University and organized by Jenny Kwok Wah Lau, Hong Kong, April 2000. Subsequently it appeared in *Film Appreciation* (Taiwan, Chinese-language translation by Yeh Yueh-yu), November 2000. For comments and encouragement, I want to thank Jenny Lau, Gina Marchetti, Kin Yan Szeto, Ting Wang, L. S. Kim, Frances Gateward, David Desser, Ben Kim, Evans Chan, David Lewei Li, and Julia Lesage.

1. Gregg Torode (in Washington), *South China Morning Post* (April 17, 2000), 3. The biggest local story in Hong Kong at the same time involved a high official of the SAR announcing that all discussion of Taiwan in the press, radio, and television should cease because “Taiwan has nothing to do with Hong Kong matters.” The local press, intellectuals, and independent legislators immediately protested.

2. For purposes of my analysis here, I am bracketing questions of aesthetic quality. I want to generate a discussion of economic, institutional, structural, and historic factors. This does not mean that I think aesthetic matters are negligible, rather that they can be addressed adequately only when contextual frames are clear.

3. Hong Kong Film Critics Society, <http://filmcritics.org.hk>.

4. Thus in a paper given at the 1998 East-West conference in Hong Kong, “Post-colonial Hong Kong Culture in the Age of Global Capitalism,” Chu Yiu Wai discussed *Tomorrow Never Dies* and *The Replacement Killers* along with work produced and directed in Hong Kong.

5. Kin Yan Elyssa Szeto, “The Cosmopolitan Martial Arts Cinema of Asia/America: Gender, Ethnicity and Transnationalism,” diss. (Northwestern University, 2004).

6. Justin Wyatt, *High Concept: Movies and Marketing in Hollywood* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1996).

7. The definitive source for such analysis is David Bordwell, Janet Staiger, and Kristin Thompson, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style and Mode of Production to 1960* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), especially 365–384.

8. Yeoh is a former Miss Malaysia, yet also a Hong Kong star, reminding us—as Maggie Cheung does also—of the perils of a purely national analysis.

9. For a very self-aware discussion of Tong (and others) working in Hollywood, see Cheung Suk-yee, “Hong Kong Filmmakers in Hollywood,” Law Kar, ed., *Border*

Crossings in Hong Kong Cinema (Hong Kong: Twenty-fourth Hong Kong International Film Festival, 2000), 124–137.

10. Steve Fore provides a thorough discussion of Chan's work, centering on his first big U.S. theatrical hit, *Rumble in the Bronx* (dir. Stanley Tong, 1995), in "Jackie Chan and the Cultural Dynamics of Global Entertainment," *Transnational Chinese Cinemas: Identity, Nationhood, Gender*, Sheldon Hsiao-peng Lu, ed. (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1997), 239–262. He updates and elaborates the discussion in "Life Imitates Entertainment: Home and Dislocation in the Films of Jackie Chan," Esther C. M. Yau, ed., *At Full Speed: Hong Kong Cinema in a Borderless World* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 115–141. Gina Marchetti considers Chan in relation to African American culture in "Jackie Chan and the Black Connection," Matthew Tinkcom and Amy Villarejo, eds., *Keyframes: Popular Culture and Cultural Studies* (London: Routledge, 2001), 137–158.

11. *Rush Hour* (dir. Brett Ratner, 1998), *Shanghai Noon* (dir. Tom Dey, 2000), *Rush Hour 2* (dir. Brett Ratner, 2001), *Shanghai Knights* (dir. David Dobkin, 2003), *Rush Hour 3* (dir. Brett Ratner, 2007).

12. Among those given major release in the U.S. market: *The Tuxedo* (2002, budget \$60 million; U.S. theatrical gross \$50 million); *The Medallion* (2003, budget \$41 million; U.S. theatrical gross, \$22 million, non-U.S. theatrical gross \$4.4 million); *Around the World in 80 days* (2004, budget \$110 million; U.S. theatrical gross \$21.4 million), www.imdb.com.

13. David Bordwell, Janet Staiger, and Kristin Thompson, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style and Mode of Production to 1960* (New York: Columbia University Press), 1985.

14. Richard Corliss, "No Cooling this Jet," *Time* (April 3, 2000): 80.

15. My debt is considerable here to Thomas Schatz, "Show Me the Money: In Search of Hits, the Industry May Go Broke," *The Nation* (April 5/12, 1999): 26–31 and to Carl Bromley, "The House that Jack Built: How Valenti Brought Hollywood to the World," *The Nation* (April 3, 2000), 39–41. Toby Miller, et al., *Global Hollywood* (London, British Film Institute, 2001), is authoritative. Also, I surveyed the independent-film sector in: "Independent Features: Hopes and Dreams," Jon Lewis, ed., *New American Cinema* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998), 307–327.

16. "Aesthetics in Action: Kung Fu, Gunplay, and Cinematic Expressivity," *Fifty Years of Electric Shadows* (Hong Kong: Urban Council of Hong Kong, 1997) 81–89. Bordwell has elaborated his discussion of "pause-burst-pause" patterns in his *Planet Hong Kong: Popular Cinema and the Art of Entertainment* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000).

17. Aaron Anderson, "Violent Dances in Martial Arts Films," *Jump Cut* 42 (2001) <http://www.ejmpcut.org/archive/jc44.2001/aaron/aaron1.html>.

18. Peter X Feng's chapter in this volume, titled "False Consciousness and Double Consciousness: Race, Virtual Reality, and the Assimilation of Hong Kong Action Cinema in *The Matrix*," elaborates another aspect of Hollywood's blurred multiculturalism in which not only are plots cross-generic (the mix of New Jack gangster and Hong Kong martial arts in *Romeo Must Die*, for example), but even action stars themselves exhibit a peculiar multicultural blurring, as in *The Matrix*'s Keanu Reeves (Chinese Hawaiian father, English mother, raised in Canada). Reeves's earlier teen roles marked him as white American. Today there is a critical mass of actors who represent the entertainment-business version of de facto multiculturalism, such as Cameron Diaz, Mariah Carey, and Vin Diesel. For a critical take on some subsequent implications, see Evans Chan, "War & Images," *Film International* 5 (2003): 10–23.

19. Capital outlay is so large that all aspects of production are covered by insurance. On-set insurance dictates that stunt-doubles are substitutable elements, whereas stars cannot be replaced if injured. Thus, none of Chan's famous dangerous Hong Kong actions can be performed in the big-budget framework. Bordwell's "pause-burst-pause" style is not only aesthetic, it is also grounded in economies of production.

20. Bordwell describes the new dominant Hollywood style in a masterful essay: "Intensified Continuity: Visual Style in Contemporary American Film," *Film Quarterly* 55.3 (2002): 16–28.

21. Chan's Hong Kong produced work since 1995's *Rumble in the Bronx* often contains problems that stem from the film's being significantly reedited for Western distribution. Fan publications often note changes between the East Asian version and the North American edit. In his 1997 essay ("Life Imitates Entertainment"), Fore describes various changes—esthetic and cultural—between the two versions of *Rumble* ranging from the music track to reducing characters and narrative. He calls the process of change "disembedding," a process that reduces cultural specificity and depth to gain a global market.

23. Thomas Schatz, "Show Me the Money," p. 30.